

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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AMEMBASSY DACCA
AMEMBASSY KABUL
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY TEHRAN
AMCONSUL KARACHI
AMCONSUL LAHORE
CINCPAC

C O N F I D E N T I A L ISLAMABAD 7509

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

EO 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT PK
SUBJ: SPECULATION ON PRESIDENT CHAUDHRY'S FUTURE

1. LIKE THE RIVER INDUS, RUMORS ABOUT THE FUTURE OF PAKISTAN'S PRESIDENT, FAZAL ELAHI CHAUDHRY, ARE IN HIGH FLOOD. CHAUDHRY'S TERM EXPIRES AUGUST 14 AND THERE IS STILL NO OFFICIAL WORD ON WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO HIM. REPORTS THAT CHAUDHRY HAS SUBMITTED HIS RESIGNATION HAVE BEEN REPEATEDLY DENIED BY THE GOP.

2. RENEWED SPECULATION ON CHAUDHRY'S FUTURE HAS BEEN SPARKED BY AN AUGUST 1 STATEMENT BY A.K. BROHI, MINISTER FOR
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LAW AND PARLIAMENTARY AFFAIRS, THAT THE CONSTITUTION WOULD "PROBABLY BE AMENDED BY THE AUTHORITY OF MARTIAL LAW TO APPOINT A NEW PRESIDENT." APPEARING IN THE GOVERNMENT-CONTROLLED PAKISTAN TIMES, THE STATEMENT MAY INDEED REFLECT OFFICIAL THINKING.

3. FOR THE PAST SEVERAL WEEKS, STORIES HAVE SURFACED IN THE PRESS THAT PAKISTAN MUSLIM LEAGUE (PML) LEADER PIR OF PAGARO

MIGHT BE ANGLING FOR THE PRESIDENCY. PAGARO'S PML IS PRESENTLY THE ONLY PARTY WHICH HAS JOINED CHIEF MARTIAL LAW ADMINISTRATOR (CMLA) GENERAL ZIA'S CABINET, AND SOME OBSERVERS FEEL THAT PAGARO MIGHT ACCEPT THE PRESIDENCY AS A FITTING REWARD. PAGARO HAS CONSISTENTLY DENIED THE REPORT BOTH PUBLICLY AND PRIVATELY, SAYING THAT SINCE THE PRESIDENCY IS NOT AN INDEPENDENT POLITICAL ACTOR, HE WOULD BE LOATH TO GIVE UP HIS PML POLITICAL BASE. BROHI HIMSELF HAS ALSO BEEN MENTIONED AS A POSSIBLE SUCCESSOR FOR CHAUDHRY.

4. COMMENT: WHILE BROHI'S STATEMENT DOES NOT RULE OUT CHAUDHRY'S REAPPOINTMENT AS PRESIDENT, HIS STATEMENT THAT THE CMLA WOULD BE WILLING TO AMEND THE CONSTITUTION TO APPOINT A NEW MAN IS A NEW STEP; ZIA HAS ALWAYS HELD THAT HE WOULD NOT CHANGE THE CONSTITUTION IN ANY WAY.

5. IF ZIA DOES AMEND THE CONSTITUTION TO APPOINT A NEW PRESIDENT, HE WILL BE SUBJECT TO TWO NEW CRITICISMS.

--SINCE CHAUDHRY WOULD LOGICALLY HAVE FILLED THE ROLE OF INTERIM PRESIDENT UNTIL ELECTIONS, SOME PEOPLE MAY CONCLUDE THAT ZIA IS DETERMINED TO HOLD OFF NATIONAL POLLS;

--BY CHANGING THE CONSTITUTION, ZIA WILL HAVE GONE BACK ON ANOTHER PROMISE, AND WILL RAISE FEARS THAT THE 1973 CONSTITUTION, WHICH WAS WROUGHT SO CAREFULLY AND MEANS MUCH TO PROVINCIAL

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POLITICAL POWERS, ESPECIALLY IN BALUCHISTAN, IS SUBJECT TO DISCRETIONARY CHANGE BY THE CMLA.
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